

361 /10/ The appearance of the villages indicates that their inhabitants feel safe. There are none of those hut clusters bunched together in [171] narrow walled-in areas to withstand the invasions of an El-hadj-Omar or of a Samory, as in Bambara country; none of those family groupings of flat-roofed huts, those strongholds sheltering the whole family from the grandfather to the last of his grandchildren to resist through sheer numbers the incursions of a more powerful neighbor, as in Gourounsi [542] country where the authority of chiefs is so weak. Here every family head, that is, a man with his wives, his unmarried children, and his servants, occupies a certain number of huts that together form his yri, a grouping Europeans call by its Bambara name, soukala.

342 The huts are circular and usually built of mud, but sometimes of
333 stakes driven into the ground and surrounded with seko, a kind of mat of plaited broad straw. The huts are surmounted with a roof, likewise of straw, resting on a wooden framework. When a native wishes to build a hut, he sets a date with a mason expert in laying mud bricks and notifies the village people. On the appointed day everyone comes to him. The women fetch water from the stream; the men excavate the soil a few meters from where the hut is to be erected; the children trample the mortar and carry to the mason the clods prepared by the old men who sit gravely around the mud pile. This is a festive occasion for the village, because the man who builds must supply drink for all, and food as well if he wishes to do things properly.

A circle is traced on the ground to indicate the outline of the hut, and the mason places the mud clods obliquely side by side along the circle. When the first round is finished, he starts another, and he proceeds in this fashion to mid-height. The work is then interrupted until the following day to give the first part a chance to dry. This is why several huts are usually built at the same time. No opening is left in the wall. When it is dry, a door is cut through, usually arched and so low that one must creep on hands and knees in order to get in. Well-to-do women close their hut with a wooden door that opens inward; it is equipped with a wooden latch that works [414] by means of a large key made of a stick with small iron rods perpendicularly attached to it. The children and even the husband usually leave their clothing, their luxury items, and their cowries in these closed huts which are better protected against thieves. Those who cannot afford this luxury of a door drive two stakes into the ground, one on each side of the opening, and slip a mat between the stakes and the wall.